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**TWO COOK COUNTY BOARD OF REVIEW ANALYSTS CHARGED WITH
ACCEPTING \$1,500 BRIBE TO FACILITATE \$14,000 PROPERTY TAX REDUCTION**

CHICAGO — Two analysts for the Cook County Board of Review were arrested today on federal bribery charges for allegedly accepting \$1,500 to facilitate reducing by more than \$14,000 the property tax assessments on three residential properties identified by a confidential source who was cooperating with federal agents. The defendants, **Thomas Hawkins** and **John Racasi**, allegedly discussed scheming with others to facilitate property tax reductions in exchange for bribes; however, the complaint charges them with accepting just one bribe. The Board of Review is comprised of three commissioners, each of whom has analysts and other staff who provide recommendations as to how the commissioners should vote in reviewing appeals of the Cook County Assessor's property tax assessments.

Hawkins, an analyst since December 2004, and Racasi, an analyst since March 2006, were both on the staff of Board of Review Commissioner A in September 2008, when they allegedly accepted the \$1,500 bribe payment. They were not charged at the time because of ongoing investigations involving Confidential Source 1 (CS1), according to a criminal complaint that was unsealed today following their arrests.

Hawkins, 48, and Racasi, 51, both of Chicago, were each charged with one count of accepting a bribe, and were scheduled to appear at 2:00 p.m. today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Jeffrey Cole in Federal Court.

The arrests and charges were announced by Gary S. Shapiro, Acting United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and Robert D. Grant, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI's Chicago City Public Corruption Task Force led the investigation with assistance from the Chicago Police Department's Internal Affairs Division, which is a task force member.

According to the complaint affidavit, uncharged Individual A had mentioned to CS1 that Individual A had the ability to help CS1 get his property taxes reduced. When CS1 began cooperating with the FBI in July 2008, CS1 raised the property tax issue with Individual A, who subsequently introduced CS1 to Hawkins, who, in turn, introduced CS1 to Racasi. CS1 recorded numerous meetings and telephone conversations with Hawkins and Racasi in which they discussed facilitating property tax reductions in exchange for bribes.

The affidavit describes CS1 as a Chicago police officer who began cooperating during an investigation of public corruption and gun-trafficking in the Chicago area. CS1 has not been charged but will likely be charged in the future with attempted extortion and firearms-related offenses, the affidavit states.

The complaint details recorded conversations in which the defendants allegedly discussed a scheme to reduce property tax assessments for bribes, but does not allege any specific instances beyond the charged bribe paid by CS1.

In July 2008, CS1 and Individual A discussed a scheme to reduce the property tax assessment on CS1's homes in Chicago and Burbank, and a condominium in Tinley Park. They discussed the fact that lawyers typically charged a fee of 33 percent of the amount of the reduction, while they believed they could obtain between 20 and 30 percent of the tax reduction through a bribery scheme. In a recorded meeting on July 28, 2008, CS1 and Individual A discussed using Individual A's influence with the Board of Review to get property taxes lowered for CS1 and recruiting business owners to apply for property tax reductions. CS1 provided Individual A with the Property Index Numbers (PINs) for the homes he owned in Chicago and Burbank.

In August 2008, Individual A introduced CS1 to Hawkins and they allegedly discussed Hawkins' ability to assist them in getting assessments reduced. Two days later, CS1 recorded a meeting at a restaurant with Hawkins, Individual A, a Restaurant Employee, and the Restaurant Owner in which they discussed obtaining property tax reductions through Individual A and Hawkins. The complaint alleges that Hawkins said:

“Right, because it's just three signatures, we only need, it's three commissioners, we only need two, two of the three, we only, each commissioner has a staff and we're analysts so we handle all the property taxes and go through the files, find out if the assessor is, is just enough because see most of them always come in high anyway until we knock it down.”

Later in August 2008, CS1 recorded a meeting with Hawkins, Racasi and Restaurant Employee, who provided PINs for properties owned by Restaurant Owner. Racasi allegedly provided CS1 detailed information about the amount of money he made for obtaining property tax assessment reductions for single-family residences. When dealing with taxpayers he knew, Racasi said he charged \$150 a PIN up front and another \$150 when the tax reduction was completed. For individuals he did not know, Racasi said he charged double. Racasi also said the “fees” had to be

split three ways among the three staffers voting on a particular reduction. If one of the three analysts did not participate, then the other two would divide the money and override the third analyst, according to the complaint affidavit.

In September 2008, CS1, Hawkins and Racasi allegedly discussed the specifics of the bribe CS1 would pay for a reduction on his property tax assessments. During their conversations, Hawkins, Racasi, and CS1 allegedly discussed a broader scheme and agreed upon charging others \$500 for each residential property going forward. Upon agreeing on a \$500 fee, the affidavit states Hawkins said, “We’re going to have a lot. Let’s do a \$500 [inaudible] fee. Alright? That’s the whole thing [inaudible] for every house because there’s going to be so many houses. That way nobody gets hoggish, and there is room to play if you want to play.” Racasi and CS1 agreed, the complaint states.

On Sept. 11, 2008, Hawkins and Racasi allegedly agreed to reduce the assessed values on CS1’s Chicago and Burbank properties and the Tinley Park property owned by Individual C for three years beginning with the 2008 tax year. Hawkins and Racasi provided CS1 with analysis sheets for these properties, which could be used to calculate the tax savings that a property owner would realize over the three-year period. In return for the \$1,500 bribe, Hawkins and Racasi allegedly promised CS1 a total tax savings for the three properties over the three-year period of at least approximately \$14,209 if a lesser reduction on the Burbank property was used, and a total tax savings of approximately \$14,900 if a higher reduction on the Burbank property was used.

The complaint alleges that the bribe payment was made on Sept. 17, 2008, when CS1 met with Hawkins and Racasi and handed the money to Racasi. Hawkins allegedly assured CS1 that Racasi would later provide Hawkins with his share of the money.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Margaret J. Schneider and Michael T. Donovan.

Bribery carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. If convicted, the Court must impose a reasonable sentence under federal statutes and the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The public is reminded that a complaint contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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